

the American people are as cynical as sometimes people in public life think they are. I think you all still believe in yourselves and your potential and your country.

Mr. Donovan. Congress is coming back from its break. And I'll just ask you just in a few seconds, have you heard anything here tonight that will change your agenda when you go back to Washington?

The President. No, but I'm going to tell them that near as I can tell, people sure want them to pass that crime bill and not fool around with it, do it right away. That's where we're going to start.

NOTE: The town meeting began at 7:35 p.m. at WCNC-TV studios.

Exchange With Reporters in Charlotte

April 5, 1994

Supreme Court Justice Resignation

Q. Mr. President, have you heard about Justice Blackmun's resignation tomorrow?

The President. I can't comment on it. Let's let him speak for himself.

Q. Have you spoken to him in the last two days?

The President. I have not.

Q. Have you got a short list, Mr. President?

The President. Let Justice Blackmun speak for himself. I have not spoken to him. We have to let him speak for himself.

Q. Has he written to you? Has he notified you?

The President. No. I have not talked to him. I have not talked to him or, to the best of my knowledge, we have received no letter from him. Let's let him speak for himself—some communication with him tomorrow.

Q. But given the recent shakeup at the White House, is the White House in a position to select a new Justice?

NOTE: The exchange began at 9:45 p.m. outside WCNC-TV studios. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on the Resignation of Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun and an Exchange With Reporters

April 6, 1994

The President. Good morning. It is my duty and my honor on behalf of the people of the United States of America to thank Justice Blackmun for his lifetime of service to our Nation.

I have received his letter announcing his intention to step down from the Supreme Court. In so doing, he will step up into our history. During his 24 years on our highest court, Justice Blackmun has become part of the rich and evolving story of American justice and constitutional law with majesty and reason, with scholarship and grace. He is a good man who has earned the respect and the gratitude of every one of his fellow countrymen and women.

When President Nixon nominated Harry Blackmun for service on the Court, his candidacy naturally occasioned a great deal of speculation about what kind of Justice he would be. Some labeled him a strict constructionist. But he rejected any attempt to tag him with a label, saying, and I quote, "I've been called liberal and conservative. Labels are deceiving. I call them as I see them." Twenty-four years later, we can say that he did exactly what he said he would do 24 years ago.

It was President Woodrow Wilson who called our judiciary "the balance wheel of our entire system." It is meant to maintain the nice adjustment between individual rights and Government powers which constitutes political liberty. Harry Blackmun has been a steady and strong hand on that balance wheel.

In cases argued before him, he found the human dimension and struck the right balance in the struggle over how we might best overcome our legacy of racism, in protecting the women's reproductive rights, in providing poor people and sick people access to the lowest priced prescription drugs, in opening the courthouse doors to the mentally ill and upholding tough sentencing guidelines that keep hardened criminals confined in prison, in averting a constitutional crisis by

voting with a united Court to tell the President who appointed him to obey the law.

Those of us who have studied the law can at times be lost in its abstractions. The habits, the procedures, the language of the law can separate lawyers from the people who look to the bar for justice. Justice Blackmun's identification was firmly and decisively with the ordinary people of this country, with their concerns. And his humanity was often given voice not only in majority opinions but in his dissents.

When he stood apart from the Court and aligned himself with an abused son against a violent parent and an indifferent child welfare agency, he appealed to the Court, "What is required of us is moral ambition. Poor Joshua. It is a sad commentary upon American life and constitutional principles that Joshua and his mother are denied by this Court the opportunity to have their rights protected." As he promised, his opinions defied labels. Only the word "justice" applies. Justice has not only been his title, it has been his guiding light.

Consider the history of which he has been a part. His tenure on the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court extended through the terms of nine Presidents. Fewer than 110 Americans have served on the Supreme Court, and Justice Blackmun served with 17 of them. Of the Judiciary Committee members who unanimously approved his nomination, including strong people in the Senate like John McClellan and Sam Ervin, Phil Hart, Hugh Scott, Mack Mathias, only three remain, Senators Kennedy, Byrd, and Thurmond. He's been part of a very lively period in American history. And he has served us well.

Let me also say on a personal note, one of the most rewarding experiences of my public life and my personal life has been the opportunity that Hillary and I have had to get to know Harry Blackmun and his wonderful wife, Doty, who is here with us today. I have seen his passion in a private way for the people of this country, for its history, for its leaders, for its institutions, for its laws, for holding us together and moving us forward.

I can only say that every one of us who serves in any capacity in public life would

do very well by the people of the United States if we could bring to our work half the integrity, the passion, and the love for this country that Justice Blackmun has given us on the United States Supreme Court for 24 years. And I thank him very much.

Justice Blackmun. Mr. President, you've been generous, far too generous in your remarks. There are those who don't agree with you, of course. [Laughter] But I really wanted to say that it's been a great privilege to be on the Federal bench for over 34 years, in 24 terms here, and to watch the country move along through those 24 years. It hasn't been much fun on most occasions, but it's a fantastic experience which few lawyers are privileged to have. And as Byron White put it a year ago, it's been a great ride. And I'm indebted to the Nation and, Mr. President, to you and your predecessors, for putting up with the like of me.

But thank you all for your generosity and for being here today. It's not easy to step aside, but I know what the numbers are and it's time. Thank you very much.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Mr. President, these are such large shoes to fill. Have you thought about the kind of person you would want? And if we could take you back to politics and the practical nature of politics, would it be possible, for instance, to elevate someone from the Senate, such as George Mitchell, without jeopardizing your program, such as health care?

The President. Well, today I'd like to make just one statement about that because I think today should be Justice Blackmun's day. We'll have a lot of time in the days ahead to discuss this.

The shoes are large. The role that he has filled on this Court is terribly important. I will attempt to appoint someone of genuine stature and a largeness of ability and spirit to the Court. I will try to do it in a timely fashion, in an appropriate and timely fashion, that is, within a reasonable amount of time. But I want to make sure that we have reviewed the appropriate options, and I will do that.

And I think we'll have lots of time to talk about it in the days ahead. But I just don't

think I should say much more today. I think this should be Justice Blackmun's day.

Roe v. Wade

Q. Mr. President, Justice Blackmun has been known for his commitment to the decision in *Roe versus Wade* that legalizes abortion. How important is it for the Supreme Court to keep that philosophy toward the right to abortion? And I wondered if Justice Blackmun might say a few words about where he thinks the Court might be headed on that issue.

The President. Well, I don't know if he wants to talk about it. You know, of course, that I agree with the decision, and I think it's an important one in a very difficult and complex area of our Nation's life. But again, I don't want to talk about the appointment of a new Justice today.

Q. Justice Blackmun, could you say a few words about *Roe versus Wade*, what it's meant and why you think that it has been an important decision for our country?

Justice Blackmun. I didn't hear that. Can you repeat it?

Q. I'm sorry. Could you say a few words about the decision in *Roe versus Wade* and about why you think it's been important for women in this country, your continued commitment to it, and where you think the Court might be headed on it?

Justice Blackmun. Well, I didn't come in here to indulge in a question-and-answer session, but I'll try to answer that. *Roe* against *Wade* hit me early in my tenure on the Supreme Court. And people forget that it was a 7-to-2 decision. They always typify it as a Blackmun opinion. But I'll say what I've said many times publicly: I think it was right in 1973, and I think it was right today. It's a step that had to be taken as we go down the road toward the full emancipation of women.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Mr. President, I take it you've had some advance warning that this might be coming. Could you give us some sense of how much opportunity you've had to get your process started and how far along it might be?

The President. Well, I spoke a little this morning with our staff about it. We will have, I think, a good process that will involve Mr.

Cutler, the White House Counsel, the Attorney General, Mr. McLarty, and Mr. Lader, who's been overseeing our personnel operations. And I think it will proceed in a very deliberate way. You know, Justice Blackmun referred in his letter to a conversation we had several months ago indicating that he might—or that he intended to leave at some time during this year or announce his intention. I, frankly, kept hoping he would change his mind. But I think we are prepared, and I think we proceed forthwith.

Q. Mr. President—this is for Justice Blackmun. I thought you had taken the public decision that your doctors would tell you when it was time to go. That having been so, can you say how you reached your decision to retire? And would you add to that how you can get along without a daily fix of hate mail? [Laughter]

Justice Blackmun. I missed the punch line.

The President. He asked how you were going to get along without your daily fix of hate mail.

He offered to take some of mine. [Laughter]

Justice Blackmun. I think the President and I have a lot to share in those hate mail things, but we'll see. We'll let the future take care of itself. I'm advised there's a vacancy on the 8th Circuit I think I'll apply for. I'll be turned down I know. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, it took you 3 months the last time. Will it take you that long this time?

The President. Thank you. Let's go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks at the Funeral Service for William H. Natcher in Bowling Green, Kentucky

April 6, 1994

To the family of our friend Bill Natcher; Mr. Speaker; Governor; distinguished Members of Congress; all those who have preceded me on the program: Reverend Welch; Reverend Bridges, thank you for that wonderful sermon; Mr. Orendorf, thank you for making us laugh and for being so wise.